



ENHANCING THE SPOKEN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVEL THROUGH THE TEACHING OF PRONUNCIATION

Irwin Amit Das

(ETS Trainer)

The Covenant Education Services,
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh (India)

Abstract

In India, students lack constant practice in speaking English, as not many peers with good communication skills are accessible easily. This paper deals with how pronunciation learning is an instructional strategy that provides the phonetic structure for English language proficiency learners. It also deals with how it develops the correct use with non-native English speakers; phonetically learning English has been found to be effective for promoting the academic achievement, language acquisition, and social development of English language learners.

Introduction

In India, English co-exists with many different Indian languages. Owing to its worldwide popularity and importance, there has been a tremendous increase in the users of English. The very fact that English medium schools and Spoken English institutes are cropping up like mushrooms is a sure indication of the consensus of opinion of the people in India, in favour of English. As a developing country, India needs English for scientific technology, business, education, travel, media, and books etc. "A knowledge of English is imperative for getting access to modern scientific and technological knowledge" (Gokak, 1964:57).



In spite of the awareness of the role of English as a global language, and also despite the great effort and money invested in learning the language, there is still a lot to be desired.

This paper deals with how pronunciation learning is an instructional strategy that provides the phonetic structure for English language proficiency learners. It also deals with how it develops the correct use with non-native English speakers; phonetically learning English has been found to be effective for promoting the academic achievement, language acquisition, and social development of English language learners.

The statistics on English speaking ability tends to be unreliable for a host of political reasons, but it is generally accepted that somewhere in the range of 30% are able, to varying degrees, speak English—though only a third have some semblance of reading and writing aptitude. We shall now look into some of the main reasons for this situation in India. All foreign or second language learners of English aim to use spoken language primarily for transactional function rather than interactional function, i.e. to be able to express their intentions (Richards 2014). To explore the matter at a more foundational level, all development begins with education, and education, of course, stems from language. Yet, language is much more than a means of communication; it determines the books one reads, the television programs one watches, the ideas one is exposed to, the values one holds, one's personal interests, and one's career opportunities.

Coming to the issues, which are concerning to English proficiency, I find that there are many students with not good communication skills and pronunciation. But there are also quite a few students who have a low proficiency level in English. The reasons behind are that their mother tongue influence (MTI) effects more and their medium of education, surrounding, model of syllabus, and teachers.

English learning is an instructional strategy that provides the phonetic structure for English language proficiency learners. Pronunciation is probably the most difficult part of learner's English to improve outside class. After all, how can you know if you are pronouncing something wrong? First of all the teacher should introduce the phonetic sounds (consonants and vowels). After that, learners should engage in pronunciation activities, and they should practice with correct pronunciation. For this the learner should listen to a recording of him/herself while just listening for



one sound that he wants to work on, e.g. making sure that your 'z' sounds don't sound like 'dz'. For example- zest becomes jest, where both words have different meaning.

Although, it might seem that English spelling is totally random and that it is impossible to know the pronunciation of a word the first time that trainer or teacher see it, that isn't quite true. In fact, with a few pronunciation rules you can usually make a good guess. For example explain the difference between 'bell' and 'bail' where both words have different meaning, and the learner can be shown how change of phonemes brings about a different in the meaning of the word, and the different pronunciations of 's' in sure, pleasure, shit and sit can be explained by the roots of the words being in different languages.

Most consonant sounds in English like fricatives (f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ etc.) can be put in pairs with another sound that has the same mouth shape and tongue position but is a voiced or unvoiced sound. In other words, most sounds come in pairs where one uses the vocal cords and the other doesn't. For example, if teacher or learner says /f/ for fat and then /v/ for vat while holding his fingers on the side of his throat around the Adam's apple, they shouldn't feel anything during /f/ but there should be a vibration when they say /v/. This kind of activities teacher should do with the English learners and should not hesitate or feel shy during teaching the sounds of English. Coming to 'S' and "sh" pronunciation, most of the English learners have this issue.

Teacher can also teach the pronunciation rules in the verb forms and in additional affixes. For example they should teach as to how **-ed** verb form changes when it is preceded by voiced or voiceless sounds. They should also teach plural marker pronunciation rules.

The vowels are very important and hence, the teacher has to pay attention to and teach or introduce them properly. Most of the time learners seem to replace the long vowel /ɔ:/ with the short vowel /ɒ/. For example word caught and cot. At the beginning itself they should be briefly introduced about the short, long vowels, and diphthongs. They can learn the difference between short and long vowel for example- sit /sɪt/ and seat /si:t/, and test /test/ becomes taste /teɪst/.



In the case of minimal pairs a change of one sound may bring about a change in the meaning of the word, to an extent that communication might get hampered. For examples- pen- pain, tell- tale, sell- sale, and sip- ship. Many learners pronounce above given words in the same way or reversely but these words have different pronunciation and meaning.

The accent is a way of pronouncing a language. An accent is the carryover of sounds from the speaker's original language to the second language. Just because of mother tongue influence (MTI) the learner accents the wrong syllable. But in English we have different rules for the word stress. For example- the English word im∇portant becomes ∇important, metho∇dology become methodo∇logy etc. It shows that word accent plays big role in spoken English. So, the learner should learn the use of proper word accent. The method to improve learners' English accent, or English word pronunciation, is to practice the proper ways to pronounce the sounds of English. Learner should also learn how to spell English word, accent marking rules and pronunciation. There is also a common misconception that fast speech is fluent speech that English spoken very fast is equivalent to fluency in English. Because they do not have proper pronunciation and intonation, it is difficult to understand people who speak too fast. Learner should slow down and speak clearly. They should not blend words together too much and make sure to separate words with a small pause for words that are difficult to pronounce.

When a learner is learning English he should be given ear training and suggested to record his own words and listen to them. But before listeners listen to the recording, try to teach pronunciation rules. After listening to the recording they should read the script or words, concentrating on getting the points that they are working on right.

Conclusion:-

The best way to enable students to express their thoughts and help them communicate with ease, is to include hours for speaking activities in the classroom. The learners should pronounce English words correctly from the beginning of the point of learning the second language and make them to practice in any mode of practice, either by recording their voices or in front of the teacher



or mirror. They should have a short course in phonetics in their proficiency course and help them to understand the difference between English pronunciation and the mother tongue pronunciation or any acquired language pronunciation.

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